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## JESUS' IDEAL OF LIFE<sup>1</sup>

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The attitude which Jesus assumed toward life made him the most renowned person in history. Mankind's chief problem is how to live. He who in the ancient world threw most light upon this problem came rightly to be counted the supreme example, teacher, and helper of men. Jesus so profoundly impressed some of his hearers with his ideal of life that they became his disciples, caught his spirit, learned his message, imitated his conduct. Through their labors, after the close of Jesus' public ministry, the gospel was spread far and wide, winning many adherents, until three hundred years later it became the dominant religion of the Mediterranean world.

Jesus' followers of the first, second, and third generations made much use of his words and deeds in preaching the gospel, impressing others as they had themselves been impressed with the strength and loftiness of his character, the truth and value of his teaching, the power and helpfulness of his career. These accounts of what he said and did and was, circulated orally in the first generation, starting in Aramaic and later being put over into Greek also for the non-Palestinian peoples who knew only Greek. Toward the close of the first generation the memorabilia of Jesus were being gathered into collections, for the fuller giving of the story of Jesus to old and to new converts. One of these collections (technically called the Logia, or the Document Q), was probably in Aramaic and was attributed to the apostle Matthew. Another collection was made by a Jerusalem Christian whom we know as Mark, but in the Greek language and for the gospel mission outside of Palestine.

During the second and third generations after Jesus the collecting of the memorabilia continued, and many persons<sup>2</sup> drew up written accounts of Jesus' ministry because of the great interest they felt in

<sup>1</sup> This article deals with a portion of Matthew's Gospel included within the International Uniform Sunday-School Lessons for January and February, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 1:1-4: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us even as they delivered

Christianity and its Founder, and out of their desire to teach the gospel to an ever-increasing number in the Roman empire. Among these several gospels of the second and third generations were to be found the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew. And when in the last half of the second century the Christians arrived at a decision as to which of the earlier collections of the words and deeds of Jesus' life should be most esteemed and used, the collections by Mark, Luke, and Matthew<sup>3</sup> were three of the four that finally became canonized.

Jesus' ideal of life is most fully and satisfactorily set forth in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>4</sup> The particular concern of the book is to present the *message* of Jesus, and its characteristic feature is the five great discourse sections—chaps. 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23-25. The first of these contains what we are accustomed to call the Sermon on the Mount, setting forth the True Righteousness; the second contains the seven parables concerning the Nature and Principles of the Kingdom; in the third section we have the Mission-Teaching of Jesus; in the fourth stands the teaching on Humility and Forgiveness; the fifth section contains the teaching against the Pharisees and Scribes, and the Eschatological teaching. Of these five great discourses,<sup>5</sup> the one in chaps. 5-7 was given the foremost place in the them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed."

<sup>3</sup> Not the collection of the first generation called above the Logia, but a later and much fuller work written in Greek. This Greek gospel, however, used the Logia (or Document Q) as one of its chief sources, and seems to have been known as the Gospel according to Matthew because of this relationship that it sustained to the earlier collection with which the name of Matthew was connected.

<sup>4</sup> The considerable tendency at the present time to prefer the Lukan form to that of Matthew in parallel passages (e. g., the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer) is perhaps more often mistaken than correct, even though the Gospel of Matthew may have been the latest of the three Synoptics, and may contain some passages that are accretions to the original memorabilia of Jesus, and may be less original than Luke at some points in the wording and arrangement of the material.

<sup>5</sup> For convenience we call them "discourses." It is not, however, understood that Jesus upon the occasions indicated gave just this material. What we have in every case is just *excerpts* from his discourses, and with these excerpts from a given occasion there have been grouped in the Gospel of Matthew teachings from other occasions in the public ministry.

book because the author regarded it as the most important. This estimate was well founded. Jesus' teaching here recorded was the most vital, most helpful, and most distinct portion of his message because it especially set forth his ideal of life. In the other discourses too this ideal may be seen in some of its aspects; but nowhere else in Matthew—indeed, nowhere else in the New Testament—is there so comprehensive and explicit an exposition of Jesus' thought about man, his potentiality, his duty, and his God. A practical way to judge whether this is the fact is by considering that no other portion of Jesus' teaching is so well known, so often read, and so much appealed to for the fundamental principles of life and for the essentials of Christianity.

The Sermon on the Mount is generally understood to have been an actual discourse of Jesus, delivered under the circumstances indicated in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.<sup>6</sup> The two accounts<sup>7</sup> are parallel, probably reporting the same occasion and teaching. Luke is much briefer than Matthew,<sup>8</sup> but his discourse has the same theme as Matthew's—the True Righteousness, or the Ideal Life. Both reports begin with the Beatitudes and end with the parable of the Two House-Builders; the intervening teaching also corresponds. Matthew gives much the fuller account of the Sermon, and enables us to see much better the presentation which Jesus gave of his ideal. Of especial importance is the larger number of Beatitudes, the major portion of Matt. 5:13-48, and the entire chap. 6. It seems likely that some verses in the Matthew discourse belonged originally to other occasions. In the course of transmission and use it was sometimes found convenient to gather the scattered teachings into topical groups for public and private reading. Matt. 6:7-15 and 7:6-11 seem to be instances of such grouping rather than original portions of the Sermon, as they break the logical and literary continuity of

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 4:23-5:1; 7:28-8:1; Luke 6:12-20; 7:1.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. 5:3-7:27; Luke 6:20-49.

<sup>8</sup> The Matthew account contains 107 verses, the Luke account 29 verses. Twenty-three and one-half of these Lukan verses are found in the Matthew Sermon (where they make 26 verses). Of the remaining 81 verses in Matthew, 34 are present in other portions of Luke's Gospel (chaps. 11-16), while 47 verses have no parallel anywhere in Luke. In other words, four-ninths of the Sermon in Matthew is given only by him.

the discourse; this may also be true of Matt. 5:25, 26, 31, 32; 6:19-34; 7:22, 23. However, the theme and general development of the Sermon are the same, whether or not these portions belonged to the original discourse; for the *nucleus* of the Sermon is unaffected.

Some scholars<sup>9</sup> hold that the entire section (Matt., chaps. 5-7) is composite, a topical grouping of teachings from various parts of Jesus' ministry, without even the nucleus of an actual address. On this view the apparent historical setting is a literary method of giving concreteness and reality to the teaching. If this hypothesis should prevail, no serious result would follow; because the teachings would be no less from Jesus, though collected from several different sermons. The important thing is that Jesus gave these teachings, and it matters little whether they were originally spoken in this or that month or year. But the great majority of scholars still understand that there was an actual Sermon on the Mount,<sup>10</sup> as the gospels narrate.

The occasion of the Sermon, as stated by Luke,<sup>11</sup> was the appointment of the twelve apostles. Jesus had been carrying on his ministry in Galilee for some time, until the people were thoroughly aroused. They came to him in throngs,<sup>12</sup> with eagerness to hear and with enthusiasm for this new leader and teacher who "taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes." The popular success of the ministry made it desirable for Jesus to select some suitable men to assist him in his work.<sup>13</sup> And it was particularly appropriate that he should on this occasion set forth, to these newly appointed apostles

<sup>9</sup> H. J. Holtzmann, Weizsäcker, Heinrici, Jülicher, Schmiedel, J. Weiss, *et al.*

<sup>10</sup> The exact place or scene of the Sermon is not known. It was some sloping hillside near Capernaum (Luke 6:12, 17; 7:1). The term "mountain" (*ὄρος*) here designates the higher land back from the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The traditional site at the "Horns of Hattin" is but one of several suitable places in the vicinity of Capernaum, and this identification was not made until the thirteenth century.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 6:12-17. Matthew does not narrate the appointment of the Twelve, but later names them as apostles (Matt. 10:2-4) when they are about to go upon their mission. Matthew's time for the Sermon does not conflict with Luke's representation of the time when it was given, because Matthew too understands (4:23-25) that the Galilean ministry had reached its height.

<sup>12</sup> Matt. 4:23-25; 7:28-8:1; Luke 6:17-19.

<sup>13</sup> Mark 3:14 reads: "He appointed twelve that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach."

and to the multitude who hung upon his words, the ideal of life which constituted his message. Over against the conception of righteousness which the regular teachers of his day inculcated out of the written and oral law, he would set a higher, freer, truer, and more helpful conception of righteousness, which by his own moral sense and spiritual insight he knew to be a better expression of God's will for men. This occasion of the appointment of the Twelve was not the first time he had undertaken to show the people what true righteousness was, for in one way or another this had been the main feature of all his teaching during the preceding Galilean ministry. But now he put the whole matter before apostles and people in a fuller, more systematic, and more impressive way than the conditions had previously permitted.

The theme and outline of this most noted and most important discourse of Jesus may be indicated as follows:<sup>14</sup>

### THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

AS RECORDED BY MATTHEW AND LUKE

*Theme:* The Ideal Life:<sup>15</sup> Its Characteristics, Mission, and Outworkings, and the Duty of Attaining It.

	Matthew	Luke
I. The Ideal Life Described	5: 1-16	6: 20-26
1) its characteristics	5: 1-12	6: 20-26
2) its mission	5: 13-16	
II. Its Relation to the Earlier Hebrew Ideal	5: 17-20	
III. The Outworkings of the Ideal Life	5: 21-7: 12	6: 27-42
1) in deeds and motives	5: 21-48	6: 27-30, 32-36
2) in real religious worship	6: 1-18	
3) in trust and self-devotion	6: 19-34	
4) in treatment of others	7: 1-12	6: 31, 37-42
IV. The Duty of Living the Ideal Life	7: 13-27	6: 43-49

One may say that this discourse epitomizes the whole message of Jesus. It is also true that the first section of this discourse, the Beatitudes,<sup>16</sup> constitutes an epitome of all that the Sermon contains;

<sup>14</sup> I use the same statement as in my article on the Sermon on the Mount in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, V, 1-45.

<sup>15</sup> This is a modern phrase corresponding to the technical term "Righteousness," which the Jews used, and which Jesus used in this Sermon (Matt. 5:6, 10, 20; 6: 1, 33).

<sup>16</sup> Matthew has eight (some count them seven) Beatitudes, while Luke has but four. The four of Luke are included in the eight of Matthew, but Matthew's addi-

for this reason it fittingly stands at the head. Jesus does not re-enact the Ten Commandments of the Old Law, to make them the most concise expression of his message. Nor does he propose a *new* Table of Commandments. He adopts—not the statutory form, not the prohibitory type, of teaching—but the *Beatitude*, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” In these eight Beatitudes<sup>17</sup> Jesus declares the characteristics of the ideal life; he pictures the feeling, thought, purpose, and conduct of such persons as would be truly righteous. It is with remarkable beauty, clearness, and force that he describes the qualities which make for an ideal humanity, which are determinative of one’s personality and career. And the characterization awakens a response in the earnest soul: “This is the kind of man that I ought and wish and purpose to be.”

Having set forth in this summary way his ideal of life, Jesus states (Matt. 5:13-16) what the function or mission of such living is. Persons of these qualities are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world”; that is to say, mankind is to be saved, human well-being is to be achieved, society is to be perfected by this kind of people. Therefore such men have the highest service to perform for their fellow-men and for God. They are to be torch-bearers to illumine the way of life, they are to be ministers of righteousness to their generation and the race. This is the supreme work, the one thing worth doing, Jesus would say; and so he exhorts men to let their light so shine.

But how did this ideal of life, this doctrine of righteousness, stand related to that which the Old Testament taught and current Judaism stood for? The Galilean multitude felt and saw that here was a new teaching; and the scribes and Pharisees were not slow to charge Jesus with rejecting—indeed destroying—the law and the prophets. tional four do not appear anywhere in Luke. Further, Luke has four Woes, stating the obverse of his four Beatitudes. Matthew does not have these four Woes, either in the Sermon on the Mount or elsewhere; but the Woe form of expression is frequent in the First Gospel, and the twenty-third chapter contains a classical series of seven Woes against the Pharisees and scribes.

<sup>17</sup> There is a preference on the part of some scholars for the Lukan number, form, and meaning of the Beatitudes. In general it would seem that the Matthew account is to be preferred over Luke, as has been done on practical grounds from the second century to the present time. The argument for Matthew’s account on historical grounds is stated in Hastings’ *Dictionary of the Bible*, V, 14-22.

Jesus met this charge with the affirmation: "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets; I came not to destroy, but to fulfil." He does not mean that he will himself render a complete obedience to the whole Old Testament law, and enjoin such obedience upon others. He means that upon the foundation of the Old Testament teaching he will build a higher exposition of God's will for men. He means that the moral-religious ideal and message of the law-givers and the prophets was in the right direction, but that he is able to carry forward still farther the revelation of human possibility and duty. Using the best that the previous centuries had achieved in the construction of a moral and religious ideal, and holding to the writings in which this ideal was formulated and mirrored, he would give men a still higher conception of how life should be lived. Jesus did not set aside the Old Testament. Nor did he promulgate it as the Pharisees and scribes were accustomed to do. He adopted a discriminating attitude toward it; on the one hand, he saw the truth and wisdom in its fundamental moral-religious qualities and teachings, and he assumed these for his own message; on the other hand, he recognized the limitations and defects which had come into the Old Testament from the imperfections of the persons and times that produced it, and these he corrected or set aside.

Jesus then goes on (Matt. 5:21-48) to show specifically how the Old Testament and current Judaism fail to give an adequate ideal, failed to reach the deeper sin of men. The Sermon as given in the First Gospel furnishes five concrete illustrations of what Jesus had in mind in defining the relation of his teaching to that which had gone before.

1. The Sixth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," is held to be good as far as it goes, since it forbids murder; but it does not sufficiently indicate the sinfulness of ill-feeling and ill-will; it does not forbid the hatred out of which murder springs. Undoubtedly the makers of the Old Testament law did regard hatred and evil intent as sinful, but the commandment does not explicitly condemn and prohibit them.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> A still more serious limitation lies in the *negative* aspect of this and others of the Ten Commandments. They forbid bad things, but the opposite *good* things they do not indicate and enjoin. That a man should love, forgive, and serve his fellow-man, not simply refrain from harming him, is not said in the Ten Commandments. Jesus



2. The Seventh Commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery," was also good as far as it went; it explicitly forbade the violation of the marriage relationship. It condemns the wrong act, but it does not specifically condemn the wrong desire and motive behind the act, and which may exist without the act. Jesus sets up a higher standard by condemning explicitly and strenuously the lust of the flesh. He insists upon a strict morality in sex matters, and exalts the ideal of marriage as a permanent and inviolable union.

3. The custom of the oath, as an attestation that one was speaking the truth, had been habitual throughout Hebrew history and the ancient world.<sup>19</sup> Jesus looked upon the oath as establishing a double standard of speech; when one spoke with the oath one must tell the truth; but if one spoke without the oath, he did not consider himself required to tell the truth. The practice of the oath had indeed reached the point where some oaths were regarded as binding one to speak the truth, while other oaths did not—allowing of deception and evasion. Jesus set aside the oath entirely, on the ground that men should always speak the truth—misrepresentation and deception were always wrong.

4. The *lex talionis*, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," grew up previous to the formation of the Old Testament law and was adopted into that law, as a means of limiting private revenge. It marked a distinct advance upon the earlier custom of furiously avenging wrongs. The principle of measured retribution—and, when practicable, "in kind"—was established as fundamental in the Old Testament law, and underlay the interpretation and administration of the law in Jesus' day.<sup>20</sup> He pointed the way to a still

summed up the Old Testament in love to God and love to man (Matt. 22:34-40; cf. 7:12). Paul also: "The whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Gal. 5:14). Jesus gave his teachings chiefly in the positive, constructive form, as is seen in the Beatitudes.

<sup>19</sup> The Ten Commandments themselves recognized the use of the oath, and the Third of them (as ordinarily interpreted) was intended to keep men from violating their oaths, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

<sup>20</sup> The *lex talionis* is still the foundation of modern jurisprudence, but retribution is less often made in kind. The humane spirit has progressed and has modified the application of justice. We can now see the beginnings of a new era in law, when love and helpfulness will determine our treatment of the delinquent classes instead of vengeance and punishment.

higher conception of law, to a better way of treating those who did wrong, namely, to love, forgive, and help them. His teaching in Matt. 5:38-42 is often spoken of as his "non-resistance" teaching, because the English translation reads "Resist not, etc." This translation, however, gives the wrong idea. Jesus is not against law, but against the *lex talionis* conception of law. What he means is, "Revenge not yourself upon him who does you wrong." Do not retaliate, do not "pay back" injury, do not return evil for evil. On the contrary, be willing to endure abuse from others because of your love for them and your desire to promote their well-being. Do not let anything stand in the way of your loving service to your fellow-men.<sup>21</sup>

5. In the verses that immediately follow (Matt. 5:43-48), concluding this primary division of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus announces the principle of love as determinative for the gospel message. He would have men feel and act lovingly toward one another, even when these others did not feel and act lovingly toward them. In other words, our attitude and conduct toward other men is not to be adjusted to their treatment of us, but is to be adjusted to the principle of love and service which we are to make the guide of our lives. The man who leads the ideal life is therefore the man who loves every one of his fellow-men, and acts always in accordance with his love. This, Jesus says, is the way God feels and acts toward all men. It is the road to the true righteousness and the universal brotherhood.

The Sermon farther on contains still another section on this same subject (Matt. 7:1-12). Here Jesus teaches that men are not to be critical and fault-finding in their attitude toward each other, continually passing unsympathetic judgment upon the thoughts, feelings, words, and acts of their fellows. Since a man has faults in himself—more serious faults perhaps than those of his neighbor—it behooves him to be gracious and considerate in all his dealings with other men. A good way to decide how you should treat others, Jesus says, is to

<sup>21</sup> Paul stood stoutly for the same principle: "Render to no man evil for evil. Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men. Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto wrath: for it is written: Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord. But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17-21).

consider how you yourself would like to be treated by them. This "Golden Rule," as we call it, is an admirable practical test of duty, which may be often and helpfully applied to the daily conduct. The purpose of the teaching is certainly not to establish a system of mutual exchange on the basis of "you be good to me and I'll be good to you"; the non-retaliation teaching just observed prevents such an understanding. Goodness is to set out from the individual, not seeking a return in kind, a *quid pro quo*, but from the purpose to love and serve others. There can be no conditions or relations in life where the principle of love, unselfishness, does not apply or stand imperative. Persons in the industrial, commercial, political, and social pursuits are as much under obligation to recognize and live by this principle as persons in the home or church or school. Being good and doing good, everywhere and all the time, is an equal ideal for all—it is the higher law for humanity. Jesus stands pre-eminent for having made this principle clearer and more effective.

Two remaining teachings as to the ideal life are set forth in the Matthew Sermon (6:6-18, 19-34). Jesus finds some of the worship of his day to be ostentatious and self-seeking, aiming to elicit the praise of men for great piety. Jesus would have men offer their worship to God in the simple and sincere purpose of reverence to him and communion with him. Instead of worshiping to be seen of men, to receive the "glory of men," people must worship for the purpose of entering into true relations with God. Alms-giving, prayer, and fasting were the three great acts of worship among the Jews, and Jesus spoke of each in turn, using the same formula to show how these acts might be rightly done.

And Jesus lays upon men the obligation to live for the kingdom, saying: "Seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33); that is, the righteousness that characterizes the kingdom of God. This righteousness Jesus defined and illustrated in all his teaching, embodied in his acts, and exemplified in his character. He does not mean that there are two things to seek: first, the kingdom; second, material things. There is but one thing to live for—the kingdom of Righteousness; everything else is to be contributory to that. Material things are to be only a means toward that end, and are to have no pursuit for their own sake. Men are to lay up treasures

in heaven, not upon the earth; that is, they are to live and work for the moral and spiritual realities, not for the transient comforts, pleasures, and possessions of the material world. Earthly treasures may be destroyed or stolen; heavenly treasures abide, and one may live forever in the joy and blessing of them. The teaching of Jesus, here as elsewhere, is to be understood as setting forth a great principle of the ideal life which men are to apply with practical reason.<sup>22</sup> He would have men entirely devoted to the highest living, free from wearing anxiety as to what the next day or year may bring forth, putting their trust in the all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving Father.

Taking as a whole the teachings contained in the Sermon on the Mount, we have the most beautiful and inspiring ideal of life that mankind possesses. It has shone through the centuries since Jesus as the guiding-star of civilization, and stands today as the finest vision of the human ideal. With all our aspiration and our striving we have made only a beginning toward its realization. Individually and collectively, men must go on to attain the kind of life which Jesus describes. The principles which he set forth must prevail in human living, and by their transforming power bring in the kingdom of God.

<sup>22</sup> The necessity of food, clothing, and shelter was obvious to Jesus (Matt. 6:25-34). The value to character and efficiency of modern education, culture, travel, etc., could not in the first century have been foreseen. All those things are to be regarded as right and good for us that increase our moral and spiritual quality and power. The material resources of the earth are to be developed and put to use for the well-being of men. This is in accordance with Jesus' idea and purpose in this teaching.